

PUBLIC

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UA 14/06 Fear for safety/ death threats

CHINA **Gao Zhisheng (m), aged 41, human rights lawyer
His family**

Human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng has survived an apparent attempt on his life which he believes was instigated by the authorities. In recent months, police officers have reportedly threatened him and his family. Amnesty International believes that their lives may be in danger.

At around 10.30pm on 17 January, Gao Zhisheng was driving in the city of Beijing when a car travelling in front of him stopped suddenly, and he narrowly avoided colliding with it. According to Gao Zhisheng, the car in front had its licence plates covered with newspaper. As Gao Zhisheng got out of his car, the car that had stopped in front of him reportedly started moving towards him, forcing him to jump out of its path in order to save himself from being run over. A military vehicle had been following behind his car, also with covered licence plates, leading Gao Zhisheng to believe that the incident was instigated by the authorities. Both vehicles left the scene immediately afterwards.

Gao Zhisheng has stated that he has been threatened and harassed by the authorities since October 2005, when he sent an open letter to the Chinese President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, urging them to respect religious freedom and end the "barbaric" crackdown on the Falun Gong spiritual movement in China. Gao Zhisheng claims that police officers have warned him that he has "crossed the line" and put himself in a "difficult position." He was briefly detained by the police in Beijing on 13 January, reportedly after he noticed police officers filming him. This prompted him to start filming the police himself, which led to him being detained. He claims police officers warned him while he was detained: "You know if we wanted to kill you, it would be as easy as killing an ant!"

Gao Zhisheng's family has reportedly been subjected to police surveillance and intimidation. He claims that on 19 December 2005 he received a telephone call from a police official who said: "We are keen to investigate facts, just like you. We have gathered a lot of information about you, including your home, your wife and your children...we even know which bus your children usually take to go to school."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Gao Zhisheng is a director of the Beijing-based Shengzhi Law Office – one of a small number of law firms in China which have taken on high-profile human rights cases. Gao Zhisheng has defended a number of activists, including Yang Maodong (also known as Guo Feixiong), who was detained for almost three months in late 2005 after he provided legal advice to villagers in Taishi, Guangdong province attempting to unseat their allegedly corrupt village leader; Zheng Yichun, a journalist and former professor who has been sentenced to seven years imprisonment for his on-line writings; and Pastor Cai Zhuohua, who has been imprisoned for three years for 'illegal business practices', including printing and selling copies of the Bible.

In November 2005, the operations of Shengzhi Law Office were suspended by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Justice for one year. In December, Gao Zhisheng's licence to practice law was revoked. These events appear to be linked to his work in defence of activists, and in particular his publication of the open letter on the subject of religious freedom. Since being forced to stop practising law, Gao Zhisheng has issued an investigative report about the crackdown on Christian House Church leaders in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of northwest China. He has also publicly resigned from the Chinese Communist Party, which might have contributed to the incidents of threats and harassment.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Chinese or your own language:

- urging the authorities to guarantee the safety of Gao Zhisheng and his family;
- calling on the authorities to conduct a full and impartial investigation into the allegations of the attempt on Gao Zhisheng's life, with a view of bringing those found guilty to justice;
- urging the authorities to allow Gao Zhisheng to continue his peaceful human rights activities free from fear of hindrance, harassment, intimidation or arbitrary detention, and to restore his license to practice law;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that all human rights defenders in China are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities in line with constitutional guarantees on the protection of human rights and international human rights standards.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China

WEN Jiabao Guojia Zongli

The State Council

9 Xihuangcheng Genbeijie

Beijingshi 100032, People's Republic of China

Fax: + 86 10 65961109 or 2260 (c/o Minister of Foreign Affairs)

Email: gazette@mail.gov.cn

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice of the People's Republic of China

WU Aiyong Buzhang

Ministry of Justice

10 Chaoyangmen Nandajie

Chao Yangqu

Beijing 100020, People's Republic of China

Fax: + 86 10 65292345

Email: minister@legalinfo.gov.cn

Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Public Security of People's Republic of China

ZHOU Yongkang Buzhang

Gong'anbu

14 Dongchang'anjie, Beijing City 100741, People's Republic of China

Fax: + 86 10 63099216 (it may be difficult to get through; please keep trying)

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Director of the Beijing Public Security Bureau

MA Zhenchuan Juzhang

Beijingshi Gong'anju

9 Qianmen Dongdajie, Dongchengqu

Beijingshi 100740, People's Republic of China

Email: 110@bjgaj.gov.cn

and to diplomatic representatives of China accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 March 2006.